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ABSTRACT

This study examined the attitudes of Texas public school principals toward the United States Supreme Court decision "Cleveland Board of Education v. LaFleur," which prohibited local school boards from establishing mandatory cutoff dates for pregnant teachers to stop and/or return to work. The population of the study consisted of all the public school principals in 1,299 secondary schools, 996 junior high schools, and 3,437 elementary schools in the state of Texas. A random sample of 600 Texas principals were mailed a law questionnaire. The findings indicate that variables such as sex and number of years of experience as principals tended to influence their attitude toward the Court decision. The study also showed that variables such as type of school, race, and school district size did not affect the principals' attitude toward the Court decision. In all analyses, a majority of the principals (69.8 percent) agreed with the Court decision. However, female principals were more in agreement with the Court decision than male principals. (SI)

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THE ATTITUDES OF PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE STATE OF TEXAS TOWARD UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT DECISION CONCERNING CONDITIONS OF PREGNANCY OF PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES

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THE ATTITUDES OF PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE STATE OF TEXAS TOWARD UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT DECISION CONCERNING CONDITIONS OF PREGNANCY OF PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES.

THIS STUDY EXAMINED THE ATTITUDES OF PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN 5732 SCHOOLS IN THE STATE OF TEXAS TOWARD UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT DECISION CONCERNING CONDITIONS OF PREGNANCY OF FEMALE PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES. THE FINDINGS INDICATE THAT VARIABLES SUCH AS SEX AND NUMBER OF YEARS OF EXPERIENCE OF PRINCIPALS TENDED TO INFLUENCE THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD THIS COURT DECISION.

THE ATTITUDES OF PUBLIC SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN THE STATE OF TEXAS TOWARD UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT DECISION CONCERNING CONDITIONS OF PREGNANCY OF PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYEES

Prior to United States Supreme Court decision in Cleveland Board of Education v. LaFleur case, 414 U.S. 632 (1974), that prohibited local school board rule establishing mandatory cutoff dates for pregnant teachers to stop and/or to return to work, some school boards were using various discriminatory policies to regulate the female teaching force. In this case, the school board required pregnant school teachers to take maternity leave without pay beginning five months of pregnancy and a teacher on such leave was not allowed to return until the beginning of next semester when her child attained the age of three months. In addition to these measures, re-employment after birth was not guaranteed.

The Supreme Court decision, abolished such practices. However, Maurer (1974), noted that the Court's attempt to provide due process for pregnant teachers while taking into consideration the school board's interest has permitted those boards to use several procedures which could accomplish results similar to the former maternity leave rules.

As a result of the vital role of public school principals in implementing the rulings of the courts, school board regulations and state laws, it is important to ascertain their perceptions -- their attitudes -- toward court decision

dealing with temporary disability, such as the condition of pregnancy of female teachers. This research was based upon the assumption that one's beliefs or attitudes influences his or her behavior. In addition, it is recognized that one's beliefs or attitudes toward a situation influences his or her perceptions, and that one's perceptions of a situation is influenced by one's beliefs or attitudes. Shaw and Wright (1967) point out that:

> Attitudes, the end products of the socialization process, significantly influences one's responses to cultural products, to other persons, and to groups of persons. If the attitude of a person toward a given object, or class of objects, is known, it can be used in conjunction with situational and other dispositional variables to predict and explain reactions of the person to that class of objects. To the extent that principles governing the change of attitudes are known, they may be used to manipulate the individual's reactions to relevant objects (as is exemplified in psychotherapy, education, and propanganda).

Cardno (1955), also pointed out that attitude entails an existing predisposition to respond to social objects which in interaction with situational and other dispositional variables, guides and directs the overt behavior of an individual. An attitude or perception, thus, can be defined as a value judgement, a belief, or a predisposition about a principle, condition, or situation that influences behavior. Therefore, an individual's attitudes or perceptions toward a particular situation, condition, or court decision may directly or indirectly influence his or her action(s) toward that decision or issue. It, then, can be assumed that those school principals who agree with a court decision would be

more inclined to enforce the letter and intent of a court decision more so than those principals who disagree with a particular court decision. Also, since public school principals have a major responsibility for the enforcement of court decisions, it is important to determine their attitudes (perceptions) and possible attitudinal conflicts toward this major court decision affecting female employees of school districts.

Method

This study is based on data taken from Nwanne's doctoral dissertation (1986) that was written under the direction of Dr. Roosevelt Washington, Jr. Also, the instrument used in this study was a law questionaire that was developed by Washington and Nwanne. It contained fifty actual Supreme Court decisions that were condensed from the official court records, the United States Code, to which the participants were asked to indicate their level of agrement (SA = Strongly Agree or A = Agree) or disagreement (D = Disagree or SD = Strongly Disagree) with each court decision. Content validity of the instrument was established using a panel of five experts who had school law training and school administrative experience. Also, a group of twenty graduate students who currently held a valid Texas administrator's certificate were used to establish test-retest reliability of the instrument ($r = .89$). One out of the fifty U. S. Supreme Court decisions from the law questionnaire was analyzed for the purpose of this study.

The population of the study consisted of all of the public school principals in the 5732 schools (1299 secondary school principals, 996 junior high school principals, and 3437 elementary school principals) in the State of Texas. From this population of principals, a random sample of 600 principals were mailed law questionnaires to complete. From the 600 randomly selected sample of participants in the study, there were 410 (68.3%) who returned completed and usable law questionnaires for analysis. The principals were grouped according to the following independent variables:

1. Type of School in which the principals worked:
    a. Elementary (K-5) = 222
    b. Jr. High (6-8) = 82
    c. Secondary (9-12) = 101

2. Sex of Principals:
    a. Males = 336
    b. Females = 73

3. Years of Experience as a Principal:
    a. 1-10 years of experience = 235
    b. 11-20 years of experience = 106
    c. 21 plus years of experience = 63

4. Ethnicity or Race of the Principals:
    a. Caucasian (White) = 328
    b. Afro-American (Black) = 33
    c. Hispanic = 46

5. Size of the School District:
    a. 1-999 ADA = 112
    b. 1000-4999 ADA = 120
    c. 5000-9999 ADA = 61
    d. 10,000 plus ADA = 114

The returned law questionnaires were analyzed using the chi-square test of independence to determine if there were significant differences between and among the principals when they were grouped by each of the independent variables of the study. Whenever a significant difference was found between

principals grouped by each of the variables using the chi-square analysis, the Z-test of differences in proportions between groups was used to determine which of the groups in each category of variables had a significantly higher proportion of respondents in agreement (SA + A) or disagreement (SD + D) with each of the court decisions.

Results

In this U.S. Supreme Court decision prohibiting a local school board rule establishing mandatory cutoff dates for pregnant teachers to stop and/or return to work, Cleveland Board of Education v. LaFleur, there were significant differences among the principals when group according to variables sex and experience. The overall chi-square (X^2) analyses of principals' perceptions toward the court decision were: Sex (df = 3) = 8.84*, experience (df = 6) = 7.17*, type of school (df = 6) = 4.26, race (df = 6) = 2.20 and school district size (df = 9) = 6.03. * = X^2, is an indication of statistically significance at $p < .05$ level. In all anslyses, a majority of the principals (69.8%) agreed with the court decision. However, female principals were more in agreement with the court decision than male principals ($Z = 3.19$, $p < .05$). Principals with one to ten years of experience were more in agreement with the court decision than those with eleven to twenty years of experience ($Z = 2.43$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The public school principals in the State of Texas that were surveyed for this study, in general, indicated positive attitudes (perceptions) toward this court decision. The State of Texas law governing the condition of pregnancy has been made to be consistent with the rulings of the Supreme Court. This is located in Texas Education Code 13.905 (a-f). It states that request for leave of absence for condition of pregnancy shall be made to the superintendent of the school district accompanied by a physician statement confirming the inability to work. The length of the leave of absence is granted by the superintendent as required by the employee. Finally the law requires employee returning to active duty to be entitled to an assignment at the school where she formerly taught.

Also, indications were that majority of the principals that were surveyed have one to ten years of experience. Of those principals with one to ten years of experience, seventy-four percent (74%), showed positive attitude twoard the court decision compared to sixty-one percent (61%), of principals with eleven to twenty years of experience. Maurer's (1974) prediction that the Supreme Court's attempt to provide due process for pregnant teachers while taking into consideration the school board's interest may result in a long maternity leave wih great difficulty for the teacher to return to her classroom could not be confirmed by the results of the study.

Conclusions and Implications

This study showed that variables such as type of school, race and school district size did not affect the attitudes of public school principals in the State of Texas toward the Supreme Court decision in Cleveland Board of Education v. LaFleur case dealing with conditions of employee pregnancy. In contrast, variables such as sex and experience tended to influence the principals' attitudes toward this court decision.

Although this exploratory study was based on public school principals in the State of Texas, it has implications for other states. The court decision in which the study was based is binding in all the fifty states of the union. Based on the data analyses, a significant greater percentage of female principals (85%) were more in agreement with the court decision than male principals (66%). Therefore, greater efforts should be made by male principals to support this and similar court decisions, state laws and school board regulations that are fair to pregnant female employees. They should recognize that the cornerstone of the case is the family - which impacts on both male and female professionals.

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